

Youth demand action on environment

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Body

This month, young people will once again take to the streets for a climate strike to coincide with United Nations Climate Week in New York.

It's a reminder that, despite a global pandemic that continues to wreak havoc on our lives, younger generations are continuing to hold the line on demanding climate action, calling for "intersectional climate justice."

This term refers to the complex layers of the climate emergency, starkly described in the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, which found that even in the best case scenario, the world will warm by at least 1.5C by 2040. That level of temperature increase threatens even more extreme weather patterns than this year's already devastating natural disasters.

"The climate crisis does not exist in a vacuum," reads the Fridays for the Future website, the youth movement founded by teen activist Greta Thunburg. It is mobilizing for the upcoming climate strike. "Other socio-economic crises such as racism, sexism, ableism, class inequality, and more amplify the climate crisis and vice versa."

The organization continues to make demands on global leaders, including divesting from fossil fuels and highlights the uneven burden that the climate catastrophe places on the Most Affected Peoples and Areas, those who are living in the Global South.

Yet, one doesn't have to look beyond Canada to find climate injustice. Ingrid Waldron, a sociology professor at Dalhousie University, has been studying the disproportionate presence of heavy industry and waste near Black and Indigenous communities and is the author of the book "There's Something in the Water." She has been vocal about the need for governments to track the impacts of pollution on marginalized communities.

"Black Lives Matter and COVID got people talking about systemic inequalities like never before," Waldron told the Guardian newspaper this year. "It created this environment where people were having discussions more about racism and systemic racism."

Examples of environmental racism include Sarnia's Chemical Valley, where Ontario's environmental commissioner found pollution was particularly affecting the people of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, and Africville in Halifax, which Vancouver-based Ecojustice notes "became a dumping ground for waste from the industries of the province's capital."

Bernice (Byers) Arseneault, a former resident and co-founder of the Africville Genealogy Society, points out in a new CBC video series, "Undisrupted," that traumatic experiences of displacement are still at risk of being perpetuated. "That's not ancient history that we read about when we went to school, that's early Canadian history in the '60s; they did that to us."

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Even today, a group of seven young Ontarians are suing the provincial government for weakening climate laws and jeopardizing charter rights.

Governments aren't the only ones being called out. In the past year alone, businesses have turned en masse to reporting on non-financial factors of their operations, known as ESGs (environmental, social and governance).

"Businesspeople know that millennials are now asking questions before they invest or work for a company," explained Majid Mirza, CEO and co-founder of ESG-Tree, a Waterloo-based company that specializes in providing ESG cloud-tracking software for private equity and venture capital firms.

"They are asking: what are your sustainability practices? What are your diversity policies? These young people will be inheriting \$24 trillion in wealth over the coming 10 years in the U.S. alone and their investment questions matter."

Sustainable investing means that pursuing profits at all costs is no longer the main consideration for shareholders. The evidence of this trend abounds: for the first time, Export Development Canada reported in its 2020 annual report on the global business it turned down because of ESG risks.

Whether in the boardroom, courtroom or bureaucracy, young people are shaping a more equitable climate agenda. It's one that's long overdue.

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